

Message Text

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PAGE 01 TEL AV 08651 271530Z
ACTION NEA-10

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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: PINT,IS
SUBJECT: CABINET CRISIS: THE RABIN-PERES RIVALRY

REF: TEL AVIV 8615

1. WITH THE CABINET CRISIS NOW A WEEK OLD, THE RABIN-PERES RIVALRY IS EMERGING AS THE MAIN TOPIC OF POLITICAL CONVERSATION AND PRESS SPECULATION. SOMEWHAT DISARMINGLY, RABIN DECLARED IN A TV INTERVIEW ON DECEMBER 24 THAT HE THOUGHT PERES WOULD BE INCLUDED IN "HIS" CABINET IN THE POST-ELECTION GOVERNMENT. HOWEVER, AND DESPITE PERES' SILENCE SINCE THE GOVERNMENT'S RESIGNATION, ALL COMMENTATORS TAKE FOR GRANTED HIS INTENTION TO CHALLENGE RABIN FOR THE TOP SPOT ON LABOR'S LIST.

2. ABBA EBAN'S DECLARED AVAILABILITY FOR PRIME MINISTER HAS NOT AFFECTED THE CONVICTION THAT THE REAL CONTEST WILL BE BETWEEN RABIN AND PERES. INDEED, EBAN IS REGARDED AS LITTLE MORE THAN A STALKING HORSE FOR PERES WHILE
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PAGE 02 TEL AV 08651 271530Z

THE LATTER CONSIDERS HIS STRATEGY AND SIZES UP THE NEW SITUATION PRESENTED BY RABIN'S ABRUPT RESIGNATION. EBAN'S CANDIDACY IS REGARDED AS AN ADVANTAGE FOR PERES SINCE EBAN CATERS TO THE SAME DOVISH ELEMENTS IN THE LABOR PARTY THAT FORM THE CORE OF RABIN'S SUPPORT. PERES AND EBAN ARE IN FACT GENERALLY BELIEVED TO HAVE REACHED AN

UNDERSTANDING THAT ONE WILL SUPPORT THE OTHER DEPENDING ON WHO EMERGES AS THE PRINCIPAL CHALLENGER TO RABIN.

3. UNTIL LAST WEEK A CONSENSUS HAD BEEN DEVELOPING THAT LABOR'S STANDARD BEARER WOULD BE CHOSEN AFTER THE PARTY'S CONVENTION IN FEBRUARY - EITHER BY THE NEW CENTRAL COMMITTEE OR BY ITS EXECUTIVE BUREAU. THE BELIEF NOW IS THAT THE DECISION CANNOT BE DELAYED UNTIL AFTER THE CONVENTION BUT WILL BE MADE BY THE EXISTING CENTRAL COMMITTEE OR (LESS LIKELY) AT THE CONVENTION ITSELF. THE PRESSURE OF TIME, OF COURSE, TENDS TO FAVOR RABIN AND WAS PROBABLY A FACTOR IN HIS CALCULATIONS OVER RESIGNING. IT IS NOT, HOWEVER, AN OBSTACLE THAT PERES CANNOT OVERCOME AND HE CAN BE EXPECTED TO MOUNT A SERIOUS CHALLENGE WHEN HE GAUGES THE TIME AS PROPITIOUS.

4. IN THE MEANTIME, SUPPORTERS OF BOTH RABIN AND PERES RESPECTIVELY ARE BUSY CANVASSING CENTRAL COMMITTEE MEMBERS TO LINE UP SUPPORT. IN GENERAL RAFI FACTION PEOPLE BACK PERES WHILE MEMBERS OF THE AHDUT AVODAH FACTION, INCLUDING FOREIGN MINISTER YIGAL ALLON, SUPPORT RABIN. THE STRUGGLE FOR VOTES THAT WILL DETERMINE THE WINNER WILL BE AMONG THE LARGER AND LESS COHESIVE MAPAI FACTION OF THE LABOR PARTY.
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